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SUBJECT: RWANDA SENATE ASSERTS AUTONOMY, SUMMONS MINISTERS
TO PUBLIC HEARINGS

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¶1. (U) Summary: On February 2 and 9, Internal Affairs Minister Christophe Bazivamo and Justice Minister Edda Mukabagwiza were summoned by the Senate to two public hearings to address questions on national security and judicial issues. Senators expressed concerns over serious human rights violations, including purported government secret detention facilities, reported by the National Human

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Rights Commission (NHRC). Senate recommendations from the ad hoc hearings included improving public perception of the police and publishing regular updates on national security policies. End summary.

¶2. (U) Pro-government newspaper "The New Times" (TNT) and state-owned TV Rwanda and Radio Rwanda reported that Internal Affairs Minister Bazivamo denied any knowledge of the alleged secret detention centers, saying that "maybe people were referring to some ill-equipped detention facilities." In reaction to Bazivamo's statement, Senator Ayinkamiye pointed out that secret detention centers were mentioned in 2002, 2003 and 2004 NHRC reports, according to TNT. Senator Kubwimana indicated that the reports identified a detention center at the Police Criminal Investigation Department office in Gikondo sector of Kigali, while Senate Vice President Prosper Higiro quoted NHRC reports on secret prisons in Kibungo, Eastern Province.

¶3. (SBU) Quoting Senatorial Committee on Political Affairs Chairperson Immaculee Gahima Kayumba, TNT reported that committee visits throughout the country revealed that several security officials were actively involved in illegal detention activities. TNT reported that "while Bazivamo said he was unaware of the existence of any such illegal prisons, Mukabagwiza said investigations into the reports would be carried out." When specifically asked about these secret detention centers during a meeting with the

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Ambassador February 23, Police Commissioner General Andrew Rwigamba denied the existence of such centers.

¶4. (U) At a follow-up public hearing on secret prisons February 9, Bazivamo focused on police stations and central prison detentions. The Minister promised that any illegal detention cases in secret facilities would be individually investigated and persons responsible would be prosecuted. Concluding the public hearing, Senate President Vincent Biruta commented that the explanations of the Internal

Affairs Minister and Justice Minister were "satisfactory."

¶5. (U) The Senate made several recommendations to the government, including "publishing a report at least once monthly about actions taken in implementing policies related to security and judicial issues, and progressively working on promoting the popularity of police and other security organs." The Senate also recommended that the GOR promptly publish its official position whenever human rights reports on Rwanda, including the annual NHRC report, are published.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: This is not the first time the Parliament has asserted its autonomy and summoned ministers to a public hearing to address issues of national concern. The first such public hearing, held in 1999, resulted in the dismissal of two ministers (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Transport) for corruption. Since then, no other ministers have been dismissed. These hearings, open to the public and conducted on an ad hoc basis, ensure that Rwandan government officials, including high-ranking presidentially appointed ministers, continue to be held accountable for their actions. Such hearings also ensure that important issues are openly addressed. Secret detention centers, if they were to exist, would be a serious human rights concern which would bear close monitoring. Post intends to pursue this question and will report on further developments.

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